A RETURN TO TRADITION

Global Moonsighting in Islamic Law

Dr. Yusof Mutahar

© 2026 Dr. Yusof Mutahar
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without prior written permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations used in academic or critical review.

Title: *A Return to Tradition: Global Moonsighting in Islamic Law*
Author: Dr. Yusof Mutahar
First Edition: 2026

Disclaimer:
This work presents a structured analysis of the evidences and juristic positions relating to moonsighting within the framework of Islamic law, with particular reference to the Ḥanafī madhhab. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of Qur'anic citations, hadith references, and juristic attributions. Any errors are unintentional and remain the responsibility of the author.

Printed in Australia

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَىٰ مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَىٰ آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا صَلَّيْتَ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَعَلَىٰ آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَّجِيدٌ

اللَّهُمَّ بَارِكْ عَلَىٰ مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَىٰ آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ كَمَا بَارَكْتَ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَعَلَىٰ آلِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّكَ حَمِيدٌ مَّجِيدٌ

O Allah, bestow Your favour upon Muhammad ﷺ and upon the family of Muhammad ﷺ , as You bestowed Your favour upon Ibrahim and upon the family of Ibrahim. Indeed, You are Praiseworthy, Glorious.

O Allah, bestow Your blessing upon Muhammad ﷺ and upon the family of Muhammad ﷺ , as You bestowed Your blessing upon Ibrahim and upon the family of Ibrahim. Indeed, You are Praiseworthy, Glorious.

Dedicated to

Imām al-Aʿẓam Abū Ḥanīfah al-Nuʿmān ibn Thābit

(raḥimahu Allāh)

The Greatest Imam — whose juristic vision established a framework of law rooted in revelation, disciplined by reason, and guided by coherence. Through his methodology, the unity of the Sharīʿah is preserved, and through his legacy, the Ummah continues to approach its acts of worship with clarity and structure.

And to my Shaykh

Shaykh al-Islām Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī

(raḥimahu Allāh)

The guardian of tradition in an age of upheaval, whose scholarship defended the integrity of the madhāhib and whose pen restored balance where confusion had taken root. Through his efforts, the voice of the classical tradition continues to speak with strength and precision.

O Allah, have mercy upon them, elevate their ranks among the righteous, and join us with them in the company of the scholars, the truthful, and the martyrs. Make this work a humble continuation of their legacy, a service to the preservation of sound methodology, and a means of unity for the Ummah of Muḥammad ﷺ. Āmīn.

“The strength of the madhhab lies not in isolated opinions, but in its coherent methodology and firmly transmitted foundations.”

— Shaykh Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari (raḥimahu Allāh)

Table of Contents

Chapter One
A Return to Tradition: Global Moonsighting and the Restoration of Legal Coherence

Chapter Two
The Qur'anic Framework: One Sacred Time for One Ummah

Chapter Three
The Sunnah: General Command and Prophetic Practice

Chapter Four
The Misuse of Evidence: A Closer Look at the Hadith of Kurayb

Chapter Five
The Collapse of Local Moonsighting: Undefined Boundaries and Manufactured Divisions

Chapter Six
Global Moonsighting Across the Madhhabs—and the Misuse of the Shāfiʿī Position

Chapter Seven
The Ḥanafī Masters and the Affirmation of Global Moonsighting

Chapter Eight
Implementation in the Modern World: Verified Sighting, Scientific Precision, and the Diyanet Model

Chapter Nine
Unity in Sacred Time: A Legal Objective, Not a Side Effect

Chapter Ten
Common Objections—Answered Clearly

Conclusion
Returning to Coherence in Sacred Time

Chapter One: A Return to Tradition: Global Moonsighting and the Restoration of Legal Coherence

Every year, as Ramadan approaches and again as Eid arrives, the Muslim Ummah finds itself caught in a cycle that has become all too familiar. Mosques on the same street begin fasting on different days. Communities celebrate Eid while their neighbours continue fasting. Families within the same household are divided in what should be one of the most unified acts of worship in Islam. What ought to be a clear and visible sign of unity has instead become a recurring source of confusion, tension, and fragmentation.

This situation is often treated as an unfortunate but unavoidable reality of modern life. Differences in geography, time zones, and local conditions are presented as sufficient justification for division. As a result, the problem is framed as logistical rather than legal, and the discussion rarely moves beyond practical concerns or emotional appeals. Yet this framing is deeply misleading. The issue of moonsighting is not simply about coordination or administration—it is fundamentally a matter of Islamic law. It is a question of fiqh, and it must be addressed through the principles, evidences, and methodologies of the legal tradition.

When the discussion is returned to that foundation, the clarity of the classical Ḥanafī position becomes immediately apparent. The relied-upon view of the madhhab is that once the crescent moon has been validly sighted and properly established, its legal consequence is not confined to a particular locality. It is not restricted to a city, a region, or the artificial boundaries of the modern nation-state. Rather, the establishment of the lunar month is treated as a single legal reality. Ramadan does not begin multiple times in different places. It begins once, and the obligation to fast follows that unified reality.

This is not a marginal interpretation within the school, nor is it a later development shaped by modern concerns. It is the dominant, transmitted, and relied-upon position found across the authoritative works of the Ḥanafī tradition. The jurists of the madhhab consistently understood the command to fast upon sighting as general in its scope, and they recognised that the legal state of the month is one, even if knowledge of that state reaches different communities at different times.

The implications of this are significant. It means that the fragmentation we witness today is not an inevitable outcome of geography, nor a faithful reflection of the legal tradition. Rather, it is the result of approaches that either depart from, or selectively engage with, the established principles of fiqh. In many contemporary contexts, especially in the West, what is presented as "local moonsighting" is not a clearly defined juristic position rooted in a single madhhab, but a hybrid practice shaped by administrative convenience, inherited habits, and unexamined assumptions.

This article seeks to address that confusion directly. It does not aim to introduce a new approach, nor to construct a modern solution detached from tradition. On the contrary, its purpose is to return to the sources: the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the structured reasoning of the Ḥanafī jurists. By examining the issue through that lens, a coherent and unified framework emerges—one that is textually grounded, legally consistent, and capable of restoring clarity to an area that has become unnecessarily complicated.

The discussion will proceed in stages. First, the Qur'anic and Prophetic foundations of moonsighting will be examined, establishing the general and unifying nature of the revealed texts. Then, the position of the Ḥanafī madhhab will be presented in detail, drawing from its primary legal authorities. This will be followed by a critical analysis of contemporary local

moonsighting practices, highlighting their internal inconsistencies and lack of clear juristic grounding. Finally, the question of implementation in the modern world will be addressed, demonstrating that a unified approach is not only theoretically sound, but practically achievable.

At its core, this is a discussion about restoring coherence. The crescent is one. The month is one. The legal ruling tied to it is one. The question, then, is not whether unity is possible, but whether we are willing to return to the framework that was always designed to produce it.

Chapter Two: The Qur'anic Framework: One Sacred Time for One Ummah

Any serious discussion about moonsighting must begin with the Qur'an. Before legal debates, before hadith interpretation, and before juristic disagreement, the revealed text establishes the foundation upon which everything else is built. If the Qur'an speaks in a unified manner about sacred time, then any attempt to fragment that time into multiple competing realities must be approached with caution.

Allah says:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَهِلَّةِ ۖ قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ

"They ask you about the crescents. Say: they are measurements of time for the people and for Hajj." **(2:189)**

This verse is fundamental. The crescent moons are not described as local markers belonging to individual regions. Rather, they are presented as a shared system of timekeeping for *the people*—a general expression that includes the entire community. The Qur'an does not speak in the language of cities, states, or borders. It does not divide the Ummah into separate lunar zones. Instead, it establishes a unified temporal structure through which acts of worship are organised.

This becomes even clearer when the verse is read in context. The crescents are tied directly to major acts of worship, including Ramadan and Hajj—both of which are inherently communal in nature. The function of the crescent, therefore, is not merely observational; it is legal and collective. It defines sacred time for the Ummah as a whole.

Allah then says:

فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ

"So whoever among you witnesses the month, let him fast it." **(2:185)**

Here, the Qur'an establishes the obligation of fasting based on the witnessing of the month. What is important is how this witnessing is understood. The verse does not describe multiple independent beginnings of Ramadan across different regions. It speaks of *the month* as a single, identifiable reality. Once that reality is established, the obligation to fast follows.

The address in the verse is collective. It is directed to the believing community as a whole, not to isolated local groups operating independently of one another. While scholars may differ on the exact mechanism by which the sighting is confirmed, the Qur'an itself does not suggest that the month fractures into separate timelines based on geography. It does not present a world in which Ramadan begins on multiple different days as a normal or intended outcome.

This point is subtle but important. The Qur'an is not a procedural manual detailing every step of moonsighting. Rather, it provides the legal and conceptual framework within which those procedures must operate. That framework is one of unity. The month is one, the command is one, and the obligation is one.

From a Ḥanafī perspective, this is exactly how the verses are understood. The legal reality of the month does not multiply simply because knowledge of it reaches different places at different times. Just as the start of the month is a single occurrence, the obligation tied to it is also singular. Differences in

awareness do not create different months; they only affect when people come to know of what has already been established.

This is why attempts to reduce moonsighting to purely local observation sit uneasily with the Qur'anic language. To say that each region operates entirely independently, with its own separate determination of Ramadan, risks turning a unified act of worship into a series of disconnected local practices. The Qur'an, however, consistently speaks in broader terms. It frames sacred time as something shared, not divided.

At its core, the Qur'anic vision is simple. The crescent marks time for the people. The month, once established, carries its ruling. The community responds to that ruling together. The details of implementation may require careful legal discussion, but the underlying principle remains clear: sacred time in Islam is not meant to be fragmented.

Chapter Three: The Sunnah: General Command and Prophetic Practice

After establishing the Qur'anic framework, the next step is to examine the Sunnah. The prophetic guidance on moonsighting does not introduce fragmentation into the system—it reinforces the same unity already present in the Qur'an. Both in wording and in practice, the Sunnah consistently ties the obligation of fasting to the sighting of the crescent itself, not to geographical boundaries.

The most foundational hadith in this discussion is the well-known statement of the Prophet ﷺ:

صُومُوا لِرُؤْيَتِهِ وَأَفْطِرُوا لِرُؤْيَتِهِ

"Fast upon its sighting, and break your fast upon its sighting."

(Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, no. 1909; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 1081)

This hadith forms the cornerstone of the entire discussion. Its wording is simple, but its legal implications are profound. The command is tied directly to the sighting of the crescent. It does not specify a city, a region, or a political boundary. It does not say, "Fast upon your local sighting," nor does it introduce any limitation based on geography. The instruction is general, and it is addressed to the Muslim community as a whole.

This generality is critical. In Islamic legal reasoning, a general command remains general unless there is clear evidence restricting it. In this case, the hadith provides no such restriction. The obligation begins when the crescent is sighted—full stop. To confine that ruling to a particular locality requires additional proof, not assumption.

The Sunnah does not only speak in general terms; it also provides practical examples that clarify how this principle was applied. One of the most important narrations in this regard is the report of Abū ʿUmayr ibn Anas, who relates from some of the Companions:

They said that the crescent of Shawwāl had not been visible to them, so they began the day fasting. Later, riders arrived and testified that they had seen the crescent the previous day. Upon receiving this testimony, the Prophet ﷺ ordered the people to break their fast and to go out for Eid the following morning.

(Reported in Sunan Abū Dāwūd, no. 1157; Sunan al-Nasāʾī, no. 2116; Sunan Ibn Mājah, no. 1653 — graded authentic)

This narration is highly significant. The key detail is that the sighting did not occur locally. The people of Madinah had not seen the crescent themselves. Yet when credible testimony arrived from elsewhere, the Prophet ﷺ did not instruct them to ignore it. He did not say that each region must rely only on its own observation. Instead, he accepted the testimony and issued a ruling for the entire community based on that information.

This is a direct and practical demonstration of the principle established in the earlier hadith. The sighting of the crescent, once properly conveyed and accepted, carries legal consequence beyond the place where it occurred. The ruling follows the sighting, not the location.

It is important to pause here and reflect on what this means. If strict local moonsighting were the intended rule, this would have been the perfect moment to establish it. The Prophet ﷺ could have easily said: “They saw it there, but we did not see it here, so each community follows its own

sighting." Instead, he unified the ruling. This is not a minor detail—it is a clear indication of how the system was meant to function.

Another narration further reinforces this point. The Prophet ﷺ said:

لَا تَصُومُوا حَتَّى تَرَوُا الْهِلَالَ، وَلَا تُفْطِرُوا حَتَّى تَرَوْهُ

"Do not fast until you see the crescent, and do not break your fast until you see it."

(Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, no. 1906; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 1080)

Like the earlier hadith, this statement is general. It establishes the principle that the start and end of Ramadan are tied to the sighting of the crescent. It does not fragment the obligation across multiple regions, nor does it suggest that each locality must operate independently. The focus remains on the crescent itself as the determining factor.

Taken together, these narrations form a coherent picture. The Prophet ﷺ established a system in which the sighting of the moon triggers a legal ruling for the community. That ruling is not inherently confined to a specific location. When testimony is properly established, it is accepted and acted upon.

From the perspective of the Ḥanafī madhhab, this is exactly how the Sunnah is understood. The general nature of these commands, combined with the Prophet's acceptance of non-local testimony, provides a strong foundation for the view that a valid sighting has broader legal effect. The obligation is tied to the establishment of the month, not to the physical act of seeing the moon in every individual location.

This also explains why later jurists placed such emphasis on verification. The issue is not whether the sighting occurred locally or elsewhere, but whether it has been properly established through reliable means. Once that condition is met, the ruling follows.

At this stage, the argument has gained significant weight. The Qur'an establishes a unified framework of sacred time. The Sunnah reinforces that framework through general commands and practical examples. Together, they point toward a system that is cohesive, consistent, and oriented toward unity.

The question that remains, then, is how this evidence was understood and applied by the jurists of the Ḥanafī school. It is to that discussion that we now turn.

Chapter Four: The Misuse of Evidence: A Closer Look at the Hadith of Kurayb

After presenting the Qur'anic framework and the Prophetic guidance that supports a unified approach to moonsighting, it becomes necessary to address the primary evidence used by those who argue for strict local moonsighting. Almost every contemporary argument for locality ultimately rests on a single narration: the hadith of **Kurayb**.

In this report, Kurayb states that the crescent was sighted in Syria on a Friday night during the time of Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan. He later travelled to Madinah and informed Ibn Abbas of this sighting. Ibn ʿAbbās responded that they had seen the moon on a Saturday night and would continue fasting until completing thirty days or seeing it themselves. When Kurayb asked whether the sighting of Muʿāwiyah was not sufficient, Ibn ʿAbbās replied: "No. This is how the Messenger of Allah ﷺ commanded us."

(Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 1087)

At first glance, this narration appears to support local moonsighting. However, a closer analysis reveals that it does not establish the principle many claim it does. When examined through the lens of legal reasoning—specifically the Ḥanafī criteria for testimony—it proves far less decisive than is often presented.

The first point to recognise is the nature of the report. This is a single narration conveying the practice of a Companion, not a direct command from the Prophet ﷺ establishing a rule of regionalism. In **Ḥanafī legal methodology**, general texts of the Qur'an and Sunnah are not restricted by isolated reports unless there is clear justification. That threshold is not met here.

Secondly, we must look at the specific **criteria for accepting a witness** in moonsighting. Under Ḥanafī fiqh, the requirements for testimony change based on the state of the sky and the nature of the month:

1. **The Number of Witnesses:** While a single upright person's report may be accepted for the start of Ramadan, the end of the month (Eid al-Fitr) strictly requires the testimony of **two upright men** (or one man and two women). Kurayb was a single individual.
2. **The Condition of the Sky:** If the skies are clear (*al-ghaym*), the requirement is even more stringent, often requiring a "large group" (*Jam'un Ghafeer*) to ensure certainty.
3. **The Presence of a Judge:** For a sighting to transition from a "report" to a "binding law," it must be delivered as formal testimony (*Shahadah*) before a *Qadi* (judge) who then issues a decree.

When we apply these criteria to the Hadith of Kurayb, the "localist" argument collapses. Kurayb was one man arriving in Madinah alone. He was not providing formal *Shahadah* to a court; he was simply informing Ibn Abbas of what had happened in Syria. For Ibn Abbas to have shifted the entire city of Madinah into Eid based on the word of a single traveler would have been a **violation of the Prophetic protocols of evidence.**

When Ibn Abbas stated, "This is how the Messenger of Allah ﷺ commanded us," he was not establishing a geographic limit, but upholding these judicial requirements. He was affirming that a sighting is only legally established for a people when it satisfies the Shari'ah standards of proof. From a Ḥanafī perspective, accepting a single traveler's report to retroactively alter the community's worship would invite **legal havoc**. If any individual's travel story could overrule the established calendar of a city without meeting the minimum number of witnesses or formal judicial verification, the administration of the Shari'ah would become unstable and chaotic.

Therefore, Ibn Abbas was acting as a precise jurist. His rejection was based not on *where* the moon was seen (Syria), but on *how* the information was delivered (unverified, single-person testimony). Far from supporting fragmented "local" sighting, this narration highlights the necessity of a reliable, unified system of verification.

Once this is understood, the apparent conflict disappears. The evidence points toward a consistent principle: a validly established sighting carries legal weight beyond its place of occurrence, provided it is conveyed through the proper legal channels. The issue was never about distance—it was about the **integrity of the evidence.**

What emerges, then, is a more nuanced and coherent understanding. The hadith of Kurayb does not establish a universal rule of local moonsighting. At most, it demonstrates that not every report from another region is automatically binding without proper verification. This is entirely consistent with the Ḥanafī emphasis on establishing sightings through reliable and recognised means.

The problem in much contemporary discussion is not the existence of this narration, but the way it is used. It is often presented as though it decisively settles the issue, while the broader body of evidence is either ignored or treated as secondary. This selective approach creates an imbalance. A single report is elevated, while multiple general texts and established juristic principles are set aside.

A more disciplined reading produces a different conclusion. The Qur'an speaks in a unified manner about sacred time. The Sunnah establishes general commands tied to the sighting of the crescent. The Prophet ﷺ himself accepted non-local testimony when it was properly conveyed. Within that

framework, the narration of Kurayb does not introduce fragmentation—it highlights the importance of verification.

Once this is understood, the apparent conflict disappears. The evidence is no longer pulling in different directions. Instead, it points toward a consistent principle: the sighting of the crescent, when validly established, carries legal weight beyond its place of occurrence. What is required is not isolation between regions, but reliability in establishing the sighting itself.

This distinction is often missed in modern discussions, which tend to move too quickly from the existence of the narration to broad conclusions about locality. A more careful approach, grounded in legal reasoning, shows that the narration does not support the kind of fragmented system that is often built upon it.

At this stage, the core evidences have been clarified. The Qur'an provides the framework, the Sunnah reinforces it, and the commonly cited counter-evidence has been shown to be far more limited in scope than it is often claimed to be. The next step, therefore, is to return to the Ḥanafī madhhab itself and examine how its jurists articulated the final legal position in light of all these evidences.

Chapter Five: The Collapse of Local Moonsighting: Undefined Boundaries and Manufactured Divisions

With the Qur'anic framework established, the Prophetic guidance clarified, and the primary counter-evidence properly understood, the discussion now turns to the modern practice of local moonsighting—particularly as it is implemented in Australia.

At this point, a simple but essential question must be asked:

What exactly is meant by "local"?

This question is rarely answered with precision, yet it lies at the heart of the entire position. Every legal system requires clear definitions. Without them, rulings become unstable, and principles collapse into inconsistency. In the case of local moonsighting, however, the term "local" is used constantly but defined inconsistently, if at all.

Is "local" a city? A state? A country? A region? A radius? The answer shifts depending on context. In Australia, for example, vast distances are treated as a single "local" unit. Perth and Sydney, separated by more than 3,000 kilometres, are often grouped together under one national decision. Darwin and Tasmania—regions with dramatically different geography and visibility conditions—are likewise treated as part of the same local framework.

Yet this raises an immediate problem. If such distances are considered "local," then what prevents a broader inclusion? Geographically, parts of northern Australia—such as Broome—are significantly closer to regions of Indonesia than they are to cities in southern Australia. If proximity and shared conditions are relevant, then why is Indonesia excluded while distant parts of Australia are included?

The answer, in practice, is not fiqh. It is borders.

Modern local moonsighting often operates on the assumption that nation-states define legal boundaries. But these borders are not Sharʿī categories. **They are the product of political history, colonial administration, and modern governance**. The Sharīʿah was not revealed according to passports, visa lines, or national jurisdictions. The crescent does not recognise these divisions, and the legal rulings tied to it were never meant to be confined by them.

This leads to a deeper inconsistency. Many proponents of local moonsighting claim alignment with the Shāfiʿī madhhab, which does give consideration to differences in horizons. However, even this appeal is frequently misunderstood. Classical discussions within the Shāfiʿī school do not endorse unlimited fragmentation. Rather, they recognise that differences in visibility may justify separation within a **defined and relatively limited geographic range**—often approximated by distances in which horizon differences become meaningful.

What we see in modern practice, however, is something entirely different. Entire continents are treated as single units when convenient, while global sighting is rejected on the basis of distance. This does not align with the Ḥanafī madhhab, which affirms broader binding. Nor does it accurately reflect the structured horizon-based reasoning found in the Shāfiʿī school. Instead, it produces a hybrid model that sits outside the coherent frameworks of the classical madhhabs.

The consequences of this lack of definition are not merely theoretical—they are visible every year.

Local moonsighting, as practiced today, consistently produces fragmentation. Different mosques within the same city begin Ramadan on different days. Eid is celebrated on multiple dates within a single community. Families are divided, sometimes within the same household. Public confusion becomes normalised, and what should be a clear and shared act of worship becomes a matter of dispute.

This outcome cannot be dismissed as incidental. A legal system must be judged, in part, by the consistency and clarity it produces. When a framework repeatedly leads to division, contradiction, and uncertainty, it raises a legitimate question about whether it has been correctly understood or properly grounded.

It is often claimed that local moonsighting represents caution, authenticity, or closeness to the Sunnah. Yet this claim becomes difficult to sustain when examined carefully. The Prophet ﷺ accepted testimony that crossed regions. The general commands of the Sunnah are not restricted by locality. The Ḥanafī madhhab explicitly affirms broader legal consequence once the crescent is established. To then construct a system that fragments the Ummah along modern political lines is not a return to the Sunnah—it is a departure from its legal logic.

A further issue lies in the role of contemporary committees. In many Western contexts, moonsighting has effectively shifted from a juristic process to an administrative one. Small groups, often operating with varying criteria and limited coordination, make determinations that are then presented as binding Islamic rulings. Yet a committee, in itself, is not a madhhab. Administrative convenience is not a substitute for legal methodology. Without clear grounding in recognised fiqh principles, such decisions risk becoming inconsistent and, at times, arbitrary.

This is not to deny the need for organisation or coordination. Rather, it is to insist that organisation must be built upon sound legal foundations. When those foundations are unclear, the structure built upon them cannot remain stable.

Ultimately, the problem with local moonsighting in its modern Australian form is not simply that it differs from global sighting. It is that it lacks a clear, consistent, and well-defined juristic basis. It does not align with the Ḥanafī position nor does it accurately reflect the structured limitations of the Shāfiʿī approach. And it produces outcomes that contradict the unity the Sharīʿah seeks to establish in acts of worship tied to sacred time.

The issue, therefore, is not merely one of preference between two valid options. It is a question of coherence. A system that cannot clearly define its own boundaries, that relies on non-Sharʿī divisions, and that repeatedly generates fragmentation must be re-examined.

And once that re-examination takes place, the contrast becomes clear. The Ḥanafī framework, grounded in general texts and consistent legal reasoning, offers a unified and stable approach. The modern localist model, by comparison, struggles to sustain itself under scrutiny.

Chapter Six: Global Moonsighting Across the Madhhabs—and the Misuse of the Shāfiʿī Position.

Up to this point, the discussion has focused primarily on the **Ḥanafī madhhab**, establishing that its relied-upon position (*zāhir al-riwāyah*) affirms the broader legal consequence of a valid sighting. However, it is vital to situate this within the wider landscape of Sunni jurisprudence. When this is done, it becomes clear that global moonsighting is not an isolated Ḥanafī eccentricity, but a robust legal methodology supported across multiple schools.

Within the **Mālikī and Ḥanbalī traditions**, there is a clear trajectory toward treating a valid sighting as having wide-reaching legal effect. Many of their jurists, like the Ḥanafīs, emphasize the general nature of the Prophetic command—"Fast when you see it"—interpreting the "you" as the global body of believers rather than a specific town or province. While discussions on distance exist, the dominant reasoning in these schools does not produce the rigid, isolated localism often assumed today.

This leaves the **Shāfiʿī madhhab**, which is frequently invoked as the primary legal basis for local moonsighting. It is true that the Shāfiʿī school gives greater consideration to the difference of horizons (*ikhtilāf al-maṭāliʿ*). However, modern appeals to this position are often oversimplified and, in many cases, outright misapplied to suit modern convenience.

Classically, the Shāfiʿī position does not endorse unrestricted fragmentation. It recognises differences in horizons only within a structured framework. The defining limit for a shared horizon is often tied to the distance of shortening prayer (**masāfat al-qaṣr**), which is approximately **120km to 135km**. Beyond this narrow range, regions are considered to have different horizons.

When examined against this classical yardstick, contemporary "local moonsighting"—particularly in contexts like Australia—reveals itself as a **hybrid system** that departs from the very tradition it claims to follow. Consider the following geographic inconsistencies:

- **The Continental Illusion**: Modern committees in Australia treat a **continent nearly 4,000km wide** as a single "local" unit. Under a genuine Shāfiʿī model, a sighting in Perth would have no bearing on Sydney, as the distance is roughly **30 times** the Shāfiʿī limit of 135km.
- **Political Borders vs. Legal Horizons**: The inconsistency becomes glaring when looking at international proximity. A "local" committee will accept a report from Hobart (over 3,700km from Darwin) while rejecting a sighting from Indonesia, even though parts of Indonesia are less than **850km from Darwin**.

This proves that current practice is not based on the Sharʻī concept of horizons (*maṭāliʿ*), but on **modern nation-state borders**. It rejects the broader binding recognized by the Ḥanafīs, yet fails to adhere to the strict geographic constraints of the Shāfiʿī school. It is a system that exists outside the disciplined frameworks of the classical schools, operating with shifting criteria that produce the very confusion and division the juristic tradition sought to avoid.

Recognising difference is not the same as abandoning structure. When the details of a madhhab—such as the **135km limit**—are ignored to accommodate national coordination, the claim to be following that madhhab becomes difficult to sustain.

By contrast, the **Ḥanafī approach** retains both clarity and coherence. It aligns with the general wording of the revealed texts, accommodates the acceptance of non-local testimony, and avoids the construction of arbitrary geographic boundaries. It sits comfortably alongside significant strands within the Mālikī

and Ḥanbalī traditions, reinforcing the idea that a unified approach to sacred time is not only possible but is the most faithful application of our juristic heritage. The question is no longer which option one prefers, but which approach remains anchored in a consistent, transmitted methodology.

Chapter Seven: The Ḥanafī Masters and the Affirmation of Global Moonsighting

Having examined the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the weaknesses in the modern localist approach, the discussion must now return to the Ḥanafī madhhab itself. It is here that the argument reaches its strongest form, because the position of the school is not built on isolated reasoning, but on a consistent and repeated transmission across its leading authorities.

The central point is straightforward: the major Ḥanafī jurists did not treat the sighting of the crescent as something confined to a particular locality. Rather, they understood that once the crescent had been validly established, its legal consequence extended beyond the place where it was seen. This was not expressed as a tentative opinion, but as the relied-upon position of the school.

Ibn Abidin, one of the most authoritative later jurists of the madhhab, explains that the command of the Prophet ﷺ to fast upon sighting is general in its scope. He makes it clear that this generality is not restricted by location, and that the obligation is tied to the establishment of the month itself, not to the individual observation of each community. In his analysis, the issue is not where the moon was seen, but whether its sighting has been properly established in a way that carries legal weight.

A similar clarity is found in the work of Ibn al-Humam. In *Fatḥ al-Qadīr*, he states that if the crescent is established in one city, it becomes binding upon all people, such that those in the East are bound by the sighting of those in the West. The wording is deliberate. It acknowledges geographical separation, yet still affirms a shared legal consequence. This is not a

conditional or hesitant statement—it reflects the dominant understanding within the school.

The same principle is reiterated by Al-Mawsili in *al-Ikhtiyār*. He explicitly states that no consideration is given to differences in horizons when determining the beginning of the month, and he attributes this position to the established transmission within the madhhab. The significance of this is that it connects the ruling not only to reasoning, but to the inherited structure of the school itself.

Al-Shurunbulali reinforces this further in *Nūr al-Īḍāh,* where he states that if the crescent is established in one region, it is binding upon all people, and that this is the position upon which the fatwā is based. This final point is crucial. It indicates that the ruling is not merely preserved in theory, but selected for practical application.

Beyond individual scholars, the major legal compendia of the madhhab present the same conclusion. Works such as *al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyyah* affirm that if the crescent is sighted in one region, the obligation extends to others—even across significant distances. This directly addresses the modern assumption that geographical separation limits legal consequence. The classical jurists were fully aware of spatial differences, yet they did not treat them as a barrier to shared obligation.

Similarly, *Fatāwā Qāḍīkhān* illustrates the practical implications of this position. It discusses cases in which different communities begin Ramadan on different days, and states that if a valid sighting is later confirmed elsewhere, those who began late must make up what they missed. This ruling only makes sense if the month itself is understood as a single legal reality. It shows

that differences in knowledge do not create different months—they only affect when people come to know of what has already been established.

When these sources are considered together, a consistent pattern emerges. The leading Ḥanafī authorities do not treat moonsighting as a localised phenomenon. They do not construct a system based on isolated regions operating independently. Instead, they articulate a framework in which the establishment of the crescent has a broader legal effect, binding upon the community once it is properly verified.

It is important to note that this position is not based on abstract preference, but on a combination of textual interpretation and legal reasoning. The general wording of the Qur'an and Sunnah is preserved, the acceptance of non-local testimony in the Prophetic practice is recognised, and the need for verification is maintained. The result is a coherent system that avoids both extremes: it neither fragments the Ummah into isolated units, nor accepts unverified claims without scrutiny.

In this light, the Ḥanafī approach represents a balance between principle and practicality. It affirms unity where the texts indicate unity, and it insists on verification where the law requires certainty. It does not rely on arbitrary boundaries or shifting definitions of locality. Instead, it ties the ruling to a single, identifiable event—the establishment of the crescent—and applies that ruling consistently.

At this stage, the cumulative weight of the argument becomes clear. The Qur'an provides a unified framework. The Sunnah reinforces it through general commands and practical examples. The leading Ḥanafī jurists

articulate and preserve that framework within a structured legal system. Together, they form a coherent and consistent approach to sacred time.

What remains, then, is not a question of whether such a framework exists, but whether contemporary practice is willing to align with it.

Chapter Eight: Implementation in the Modern World: Verified Sighting, Scientific Precision, and the Diyanet Model

After establishing the textual foundations, the juristic position of the Ḥanafī madhhab, and the weaknesses of modern localist approaches, a final question naturally arises: **how is global moonsighting to be implemented in the modern world?**

This question is often raised as an objection. Even those who accept the strength of the evidences may hesitate at the level of practice, arguing that while global moonsighting may be correct in theory, it is difficult to apply in reality. Concerns are raised about false reports, conflicting testimonies, and the reliability of information coming from distant regions.

However, these concerns are not new, nor are they insurmountable. In fact, when properly understood, the Ḥanafī framework already contains the tools needed to address them. The key lies in distinguishing between two principles that must operate together: **ruʾyah (sighting)** and **verification**.

The Sharīʿah ties the beginning of Ramadan to the sighting of the crescent. This principle remains unchanged. At the same time, the Sharīʿah does not accept claims blindly. Testimony must be established, witnesses must be reliable, and the claim must meet the standards of legal acceptance. This is not unique to moonsighting—it is a general principle across all areas of Islamic law.

In the modern world, an additional tool is available that can assist in this process: astronomy. It is essential, however, to understand its role correctly. The use of astronomical knowledge is not a replacement for sighting, nor

does it transform the system into one based purely on calculation. Rather, it functions as a means of verification.

If a claim of sighting is made at a time when the moon has not yet been born, or when it has already set before sunset, then the claim is not simply doubtful—it is impossible. In such cases, the testimony must be rejected. This is entirely consistent with the principles of the Sharīʿah, which does not accept impossible claims in any legal context.

At the same time, astronomy can guide the process in a constructive way. It can indicate when the crescent is likely to be visible, helping observers know when and where to look. It can narrow the window of expectation without replacing the act of sighting itself. In this sense, it serves as a tool that enhances reliability while preserving the Prophetic method.

One of the clearest contemporary examples of this balanced approach is the system employed by the **Diyanet**. The Diyanet operates on a model that combines global unity with structured verification. It adopts a unified calendar for Ramadan and Eid, while ensuring that the criteria for visibility are grounded in both observational possibility and legal reliability.

In practice, this means that astronomical data is used to determine when sighting is possible, not to replace sighting altogether. Reports that fall within the realm of possibility are considered and evaluated, while those that are scientifically impossible are rejected. The result is a system that maintains fidelity to the principle of ruʾyah while avoiding the pitfalls of false or mistaken testimony.

This approach closely mirrors the spirit of classical Ḥanafī reasoning. The jurists of the past did not have access to modern astronomical tools, but they

did operate with the same underlying principles: the need for certainty, the rejection of unreliable claims, and the preservation of unity in the application of sacred time. The Diyanet model can therefore be seen not as an innovation in principle, but as a refinement in method—using contemporary knowledge to better implement established legal rules.

The practical benefits of such a system are significant. It provides clarity by establishing a single, consistent date for Ramadan and Eid. It reduces confusion by eliminating contradictory announcements. It strengthens trust by ensuring that decisions are based on verified information rather than isolated claims. Most importantly, it restores a sense of unity to acts of worship that are meant to be shared across the Ummah.

By contrast, systems that rely on fragmented local committees often struggle to achieve these outcomes. Without consistent criteria, different groups may arrive at different conclusions based on the same set of facts. Without verification, unreliable claims may be accepted or rejected inconsistently. The result is not simply diversity, but confusion.

A properly implemented global moonsighting framework avoids these issues by combining three elements: a commitment to the Prophetic principle of sighting, a rigorous process of verification, and a unified application of the ruling once it is established. When these elements are brought together, the system becomes both faithful to the tradition and effective in practice.

At its core, the question of implementation is not about choosing between tradition and modernity. It is about applying timeless principles with the best tools available. The Ḥanafī framework, when properly understood, is fully capable of accommodating this. It does not require abandoning the Sunnah,

nor does it require ignoring reality. It simply requires that the process of establishing the crescent be carried out with both integrity and precision.

In doing so, it offers a path forward—one that preserves the legal and spiritual unity of the Ummah, while addressing the practical challenges of the modern world.

Chapter Nine: Unity in Sacred Time: A Legal Objective, Not a Side Effect

Beyond the textual evidences and juristic positions, there is a broader dimension to this discussion that cannot be ignored: the objective of unity in the life of the Muslim community. Acts of worship in Islam are not all structured in the same way. Some are individual and private, while others are inherently communal, designed to be experienced collectively. Ramadan and Eid fall firmly into the latter category.

The beginning of Ramadan is not simply the start of a personal fast. It marks a shared entry into a sacred period observed by the entire Ummah. Likewise, Eid is not merely the conclusion of individual worship—it is a public and communal celebration, defined by gathering, prayer, and collective expression. These are moments in which the unity of the Muslim community is meant to be visible, not only in belief, but in practice.

For this reason, the organisation of sacred time in Islam is not a neutral matter. It is not simply about determining dates in isolation. It shapes the rhythm of communal life. When that rhythm is unified, it strengthens a sense of belonging and shared purpose. When it is fragmented, the effects are immediately felt.

The question, then, is whether a system that consistently produces division can be seen as aligned with the objectives of the Sharīʿah.

Each year, in many parts of the world, Ramadan begins on multiple different days within the same city. Eid is celebrated on separate dates by neighbouring communities. Families are divided, mosques differ publicly, and confusion becomes normalised. This is not an occasional anomaly—it is a

recurring pattern. Over time, what should be a moment of clarity becomes a point of uncertainty.

It is important to be precise here. The existence of disagreement in fiqh is not, in itself, a problem. The Islamic legal tradition has always recognised legitimate differences of opinion. However, not every outcome of disagreement is equal. When a particular approach repeatedly results in visible fragmentation in acts of collective worship, it raises a legitimate question about whether it is fulfilling the purpose those acts were meant to serve.

From a Ḥanafī perspective, the approach to moonsighting reflects an awareness of this issue. By treating the establishment of the crescent as a single legal reality with broader consequence, the madhhab preserves a unified structure for sacred time. It does not eliminate the need for verification or legal process, but once the month is established, it avoids multiplying obligations across different regions without necessity.

This is not merely a technical advantage—it is a reflection of legal coherence. The Sharīʿah does not aim to create unnecessary complexity where clarity is possible. Nor does it promote fragmentation where unity can be maintained without compromising evidence or principle.

By contrast, modern local moonsighting often produces outcomes that sit uneasily with this objective. The division it generates is not always treated as a problem to be solved, but sometimes as a natural or even acceptable consequence. In some cases, it is even framed as a sign of sincerity or caution. Yet this framing deserves scrutiny. Repeated fragmentation in communal

worship is not, in itself, a sign of strength. It may instead point to a deeper issue in how the underlying principles are being applied.

At its core, the Sharīʿah seeks to establish order, clarity, and cohesion in the life of the Muslim community. This does not mean eliminating all differences, but it does mean that differences should operate within a framework that preserves the integrity of shared practices. When sacred time becomes inconsistent within the same community, that integrity is weakened.

The Ḥanafī model offers a way to address this without abandoning legal discipline. It does not rely on emotional appeals to unity, nor does it force uniformity without evidence. Rather, it follows from a reading of the texts that already points toward a unified understanding of the lunar month. In doing so, it aligns both with the letter of the law and with its broader purpose.

Unity in Ramadan and Eid is not an optional benefit—it is part of the wisdom behind how these acts of worship are structured. A legal approach that preserves that unity, while remaining faithful to the evidences, is not only stronger in argument, but closer to the intended function of the Sharīʿah itself.

Chapter Ten: Common Objections—Answered Clearly

At this point, the evidences have been laid out, the juristic positions clarified, and the weaknesses of modern local moonsighting exposed. Yet a number of common objections continue to surface in discussion. These objections are often repeated, but when examined carefully, they do not undermine the argument for global moonsighting as grounded in the Ḥanafī tradition.

One of the most frequently raised points is that "scholars differ," and therefore the issue should be treated as open-ended. While it is true that differences of opinion exist within the broader legal tradition, this statement is often used without precision. Not all positions carry equal weight within a madhhab, and not all interpretations are applied in the same way. The existence of disagreement does not remove the need to identify the stronger, relied-upon position. In the case of the Ḥanafī madhhab, that position has already been clearly established. To invoke difference without engaging with the structure of the madhhab is to avoid the question rather than answer it.

Another common claim is that communities should simply follow their local scholars. At a general level, this principle is sound. However, it depends on an accurate understanding of what those scholars themselves are following. If a local practice is not clearly grounded in the established positions of a recognised madhhab, then appealing to locality alone does not resolve the issue. Following scholars requires understanding the legal framework they are operating within, not simply adopting outcomes without examining their basis.

A further objection suggests that global moonsighting leads to blind following of other countries, often framed as dependence on foreign authorities. This characterisation is misleading. A properly implemented

global approach is not based on imitation, but on verification. The question is not who made the announcement, but whether the sighting has been validly established according to Sharʿī standards. Once that condition is met, the ruling follows. This is entirely consistent with the principles of Islamic law, which tie obligations to established facts rather than to geographical identity.

It is also sometimes argued that local moonsighting is more cautious, and therefore closer to piety. This claim deserves careful consideration. True caution in fiqh does not mean introducing restrictions without evidence. It means adhering closely to the texts and applying them with consistency. If the general commands of the Qur'an and Sunnah are not restricted by locality, and if the juristic tradition affirms broader legal consequence, then confining the ruling to local observation alone is not an expression of caution —it is an addition that requires justification.

Finally, some argue that the current fragmented system is simply a practical reality that must be accepted. Yet practicality cannot override principle. The purpose of legal reasoning is not merely to accommodate existing habits, but to guide them. If a system produces repeated confusion and division, it is not enough to normalise it. It must be examined in light of the evidences and, where necessary, corrected.

When these objections are considered together, a pattern emerges. Many of them rely on general statements—about difference, locality, or caution—without engaging directly with the specific evidences and legal structures involved. Once those are brought into focus, the objections lose much of their force.

The issue, therefore, is not one of unresolved ambiguity. The framework is clear, the evidences are established, and the juristic reasoning is coherent. What remains is the question of whether contemporary practice is willing to align itself with that clarity.

Conclusion: Returning to Coherence in Sacred Time

The discussion of moonsighting is often presented as a complex and unsettled issue, shaped by geography, differing opinions, and practical constraints. Yet when the matter is approached through the proper lens—beginning with the Qur'an, clarified by the Sunnah, and structured through the methodology of the juristic tradition—a different picture emerges. The framework is not unclear. It is not fragmented. It is, in fact, remarkably coherent.

The Qur'an establishes a unified understanding of sacred time, presenting the crescent as a shared marker for the community as a whole. The Sunnah reinforces this through general commands tied directly to the sighting of the moon, without restriction to locality. The Prophetic practice demonstrates that valid testimony is accepted even when it originates beyond one's immediate region. The Ḥanafī jurists then articulate this framework with precision, affirming that once the crescent is properly established, its legal consequence extends beyond the place of observation.

Against this, the modern practice of local moonsighting—particularly in contexts such as Australia—struggles to present a consistent and well-defined alternative. It operates with shifting definitions of locality, relies on non-Sharʿī boundaries, and often produces outcomes that conflict with the unity inherent in acts of communal worship. Its appeal to the Shāfiʿī madhhab is frequently incomplete, and its practical application does not consistently reflect the structured reasoning of any single school.

At the same time, the implementation of a unified approach is neither unrealistic nor impractical. When sighting is combined with proper verification, and supported by tools that help distinguish between possible

and impossible claims, the system becomes both reliable and clear. Models that apply these principles demonstrate that unity in Ramadan and Eid is not only achievable, but sustainable.

What, then, remains?

Not a lack of evidence. Not a lack of juristic guidance. Rather, a question of alignment.

The crescent is one. The month it marks is one. The legal ruling tied to it is one. The division we witness is not rooted in the structure of the Sharīʿah itself, but in how that structure is sometimes applied.

To return to coherence is not to introduce something new. It is to return to what was already there: a system in which sacred time is shared, obligations are clear, and the community acts together.

In the end, the issue is not whether unity is possible. It is whether we are prepared to adopt the framework that was designed to preserve it.

And Allah knows best.